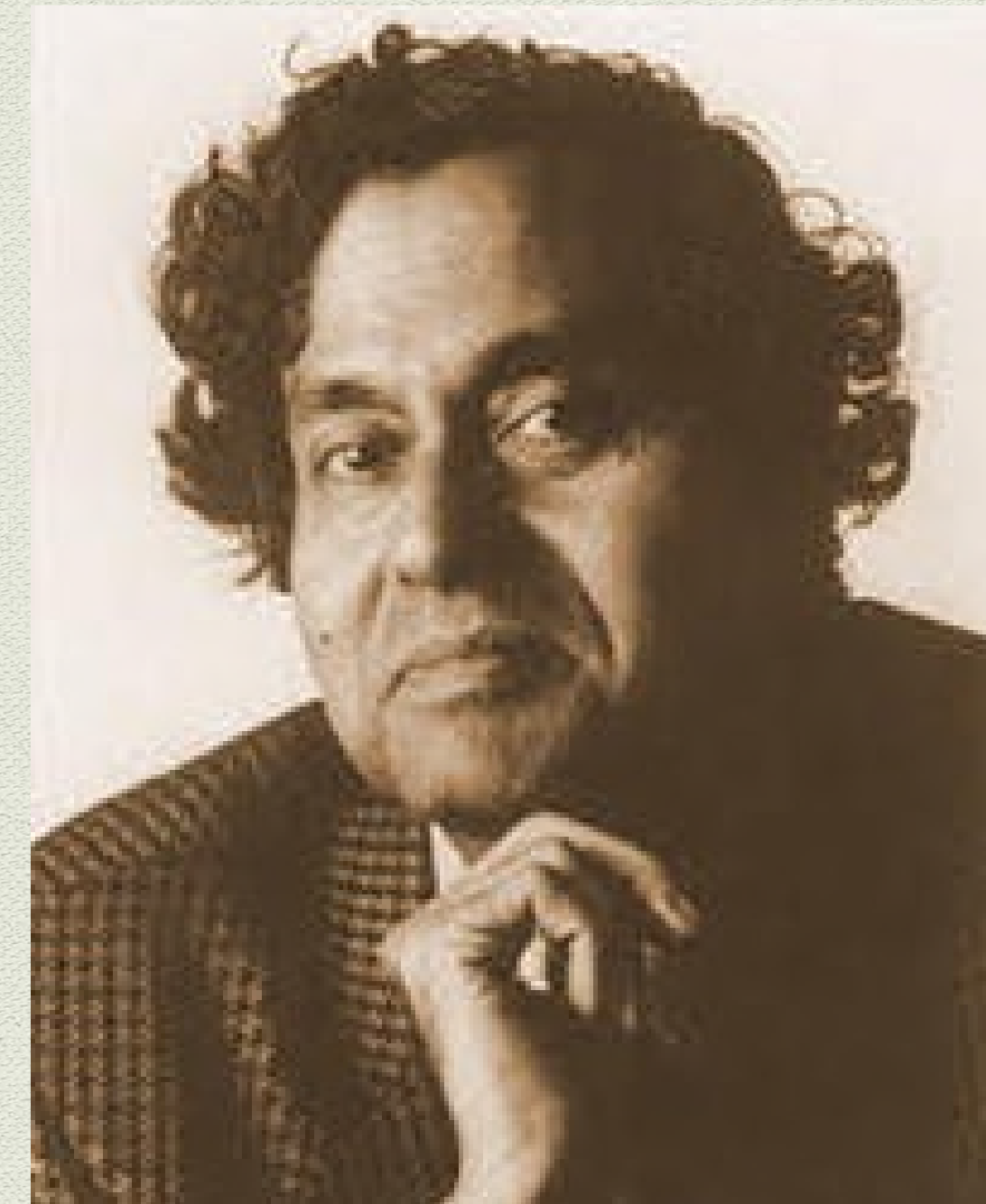# Seeing Face-to-Face: Nyāya Realism
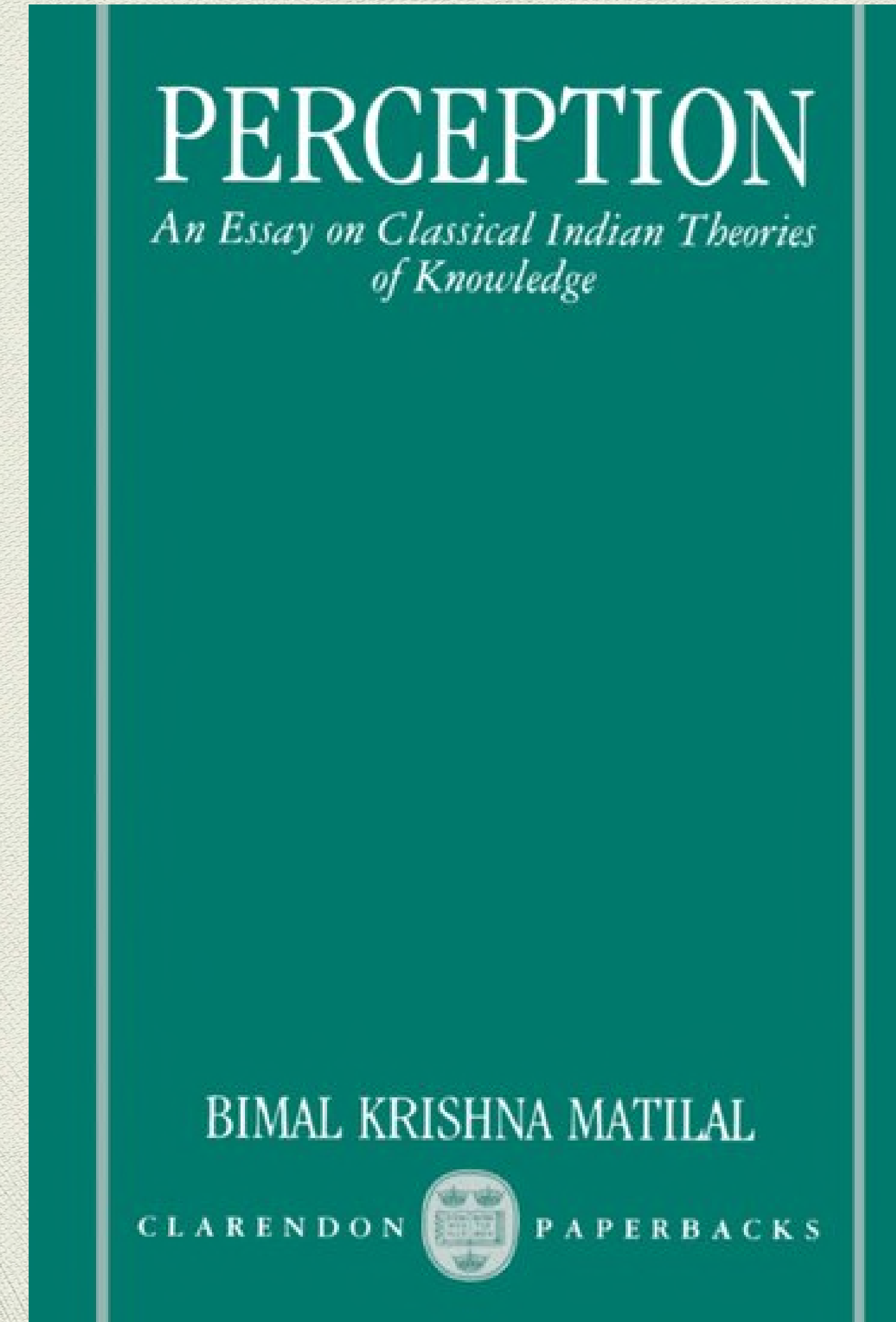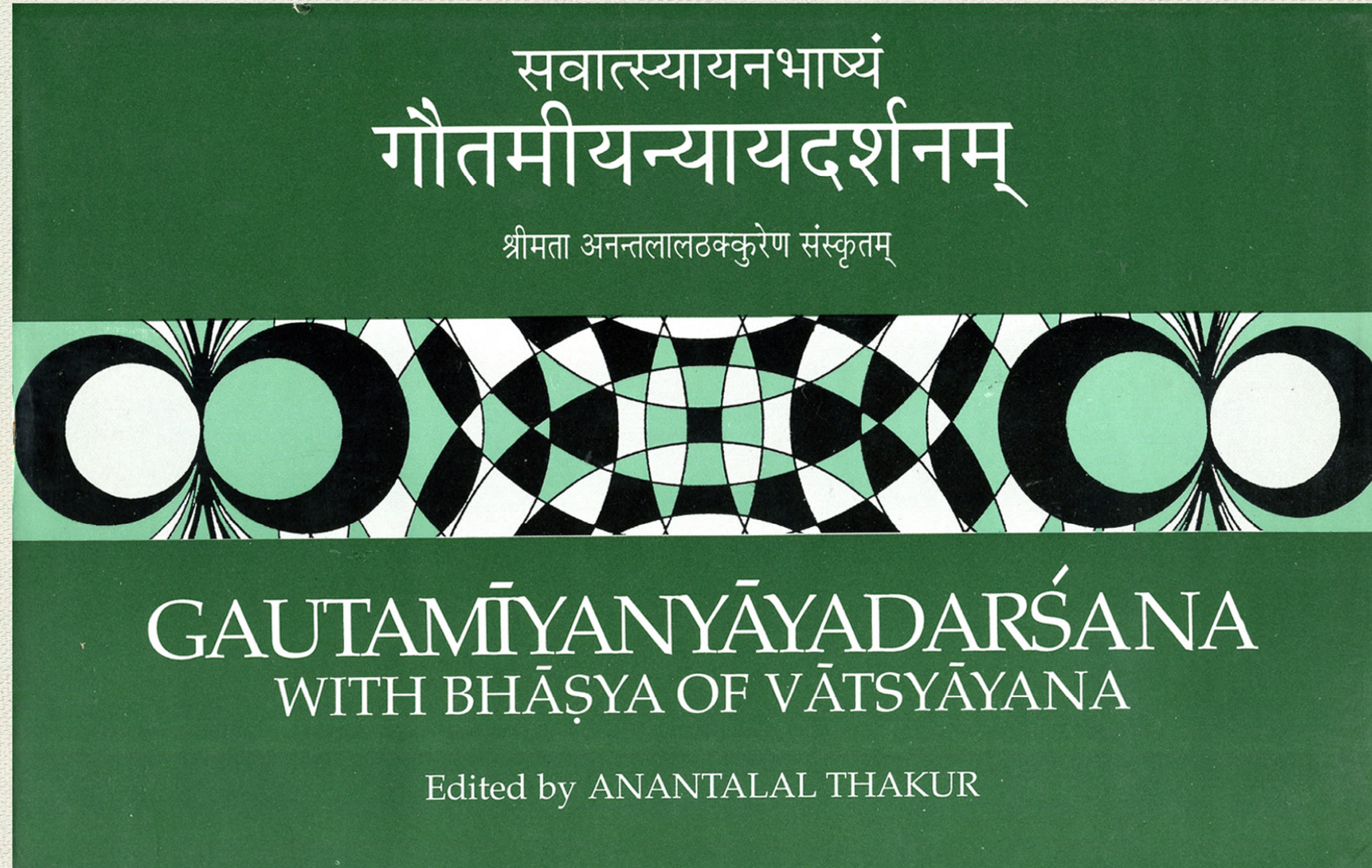
Jonardon Ganeri

(1935–1991)

Nyāya Naïve Realism

सवात्स्यायनभाष्यं
गौतमीयन्यायदर्शनम्
श्रीमता अनन्तलालठक्कुरेण संस्कृतम्

GAUTAMĪYANYĀYADARŚANA
WITH BHĀṢYA OF VĀTSYĀYANA

Edited by ANANTALAL THAKUR

PERCEPTION
An Essay on Classical Indian Theories
of Knowledge

BIMAL KRISHNA MATILAL

CLARENDON ✦ PAPERBACKS

I have wilfully mixed separate disciplines in [my] presentation of classical Indian philosophy, the domain of the Sanskritists and the Indianists, and modern Western analytical philosophy. This has been done with the conviction that such an eclectic approach would be eventually profitable, and I believe, **even philosophically rewarding**. I have translated back and forth the philosophical issues that faced the classical Indian philosophers, in the vocabulary of modern philosophy, and vice-versa […] I believe such translations are both possible and fruitful for *both* kinds of philosophers today. I think it gives better **insight into the nature of the philosophical problems as such**—problems the classical people were trying to grapple with. And the reverse translation it is hoped, may illuminate some modern issues, some unrecognized aspects of these issues at least, and by doing so, may **stimulate creative thinking** all the more. Philosophical discourse need not be a dead-end, where intrusion of fresh ideas from outside as well as from the past would not be allowed. (2002a, 109).
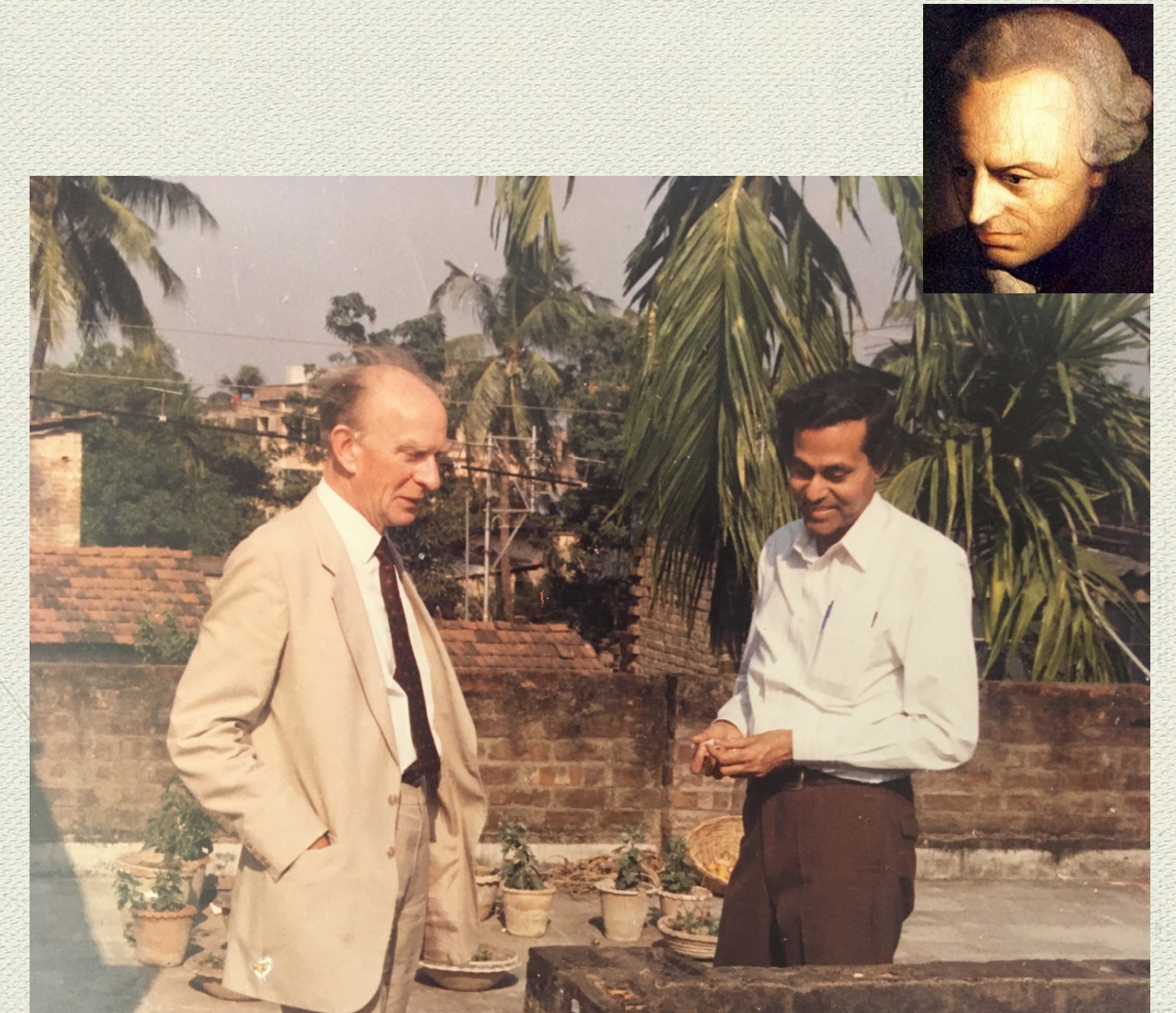
The Kant-Strawson Thesis

Matilal: "… the time-honoured distinction found in the entire classical literature on the Sanskrit philosophy of perception is made with the help of this word '*vikalpa*': *nir-vikalpa pratyakṣa*, 'perception without imagination' and *sa-vikalpa pratyakṣa* 'perception with imagination' (1986, 313–4), adding that such perceptual experience is "*infused* or *soaked* with imagination in the sense of concept-application and object-identification […and…] necessarily *contaminated* with proliferation of concepts" (1986, 313).

Strawson: ""the actual occurrent perception of an enduring object as an object of a certain kind, or as a particular object of that kind, is […] soaked with or animated by or infused with–the metaphors are *à choix*–[concepts]" (1974, 53).

Kant: "No psychologist has yet thought that the imagination is a necessary ingredient of perception itself. […However…] the senses do not merely afford us impressions but also put them together, and produce images of objects, for which without doubt something more than the receptivity of impressions is required, namely a function of the synthesis of them" (*Critique* A120, note a)

The Kant-Strawson Thesis

Matilal: "…the ordinary sense of the word ["imagination'] is an inventive, fanciful or playful application of concepts to things, while the philosophically relevant sense stands for ordinary concept-application in perception. Without further ado I might add that *kalpanā* in ordinary Sanskrit (such as *kavi-kalpanā*) means the same thing as 'imagination' in ordinary English, while the technical sense is not very far from what 'imagination' means in the writings of Hume and Kant." (1986, 313)

"I wish to argue that seeing is mostly seeing-as …, i.e. is seeing something as something and it is only with regard to such seeing-as that the possibility of promiscuity, i.e. the possibility of illusion, can arise" (1986, 181).
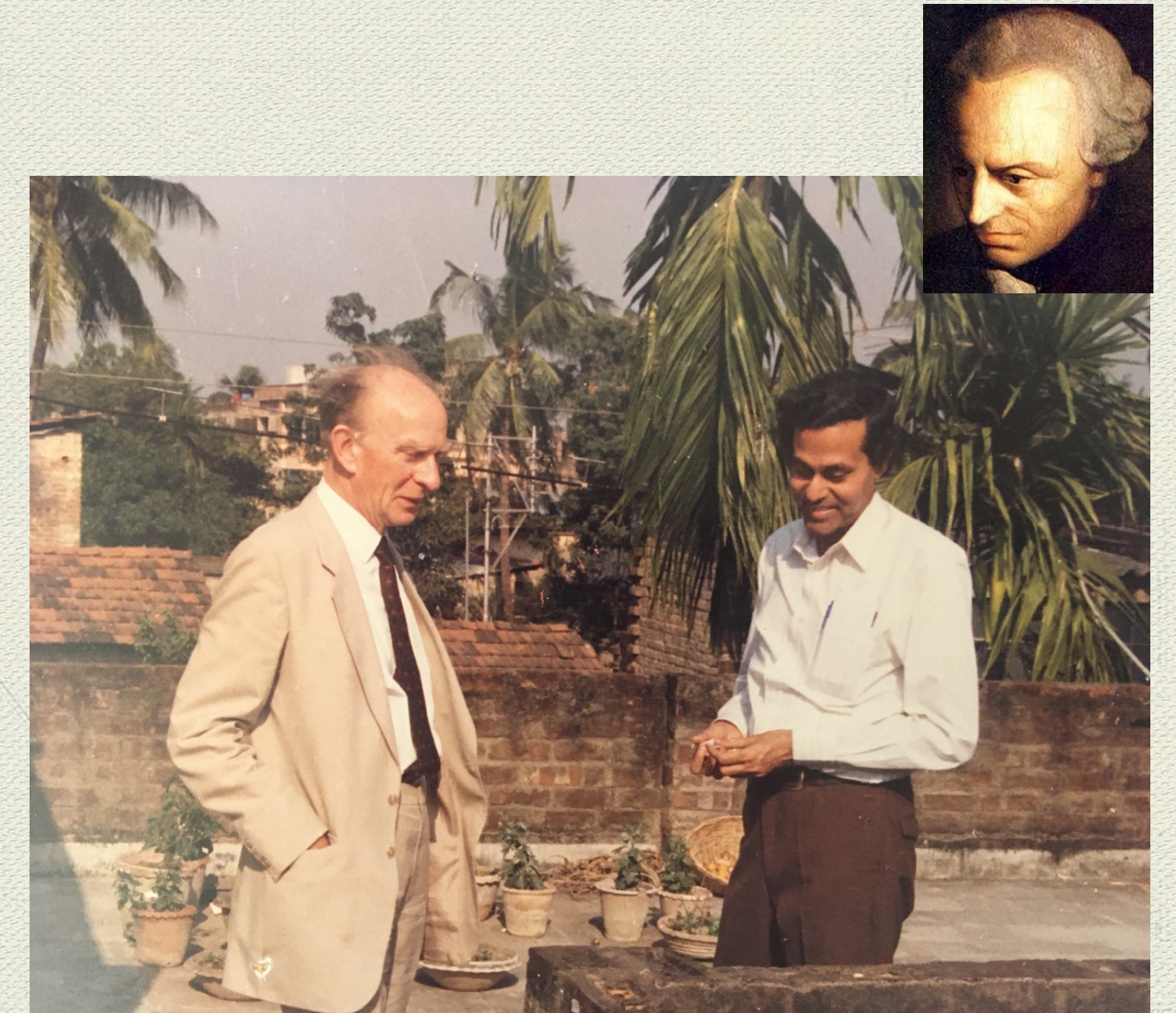
Nyāya Realism

- [**Direct Realism**] "What we are directly aware of in our perception is the physical reality that exists independently of our awareness of it."
- [**Empiricism**] "Perceiving is knowing in the most direct sense, and there is no further basis or foundation or ground which is more indubitable or certain, and from which such perceptual knowledge is derived or inferred."
- [**Argumentation**] "We see as well as touch physical objects, wholes, bodies, and their properties as well. [W]e see and touch wholes and substrata because they have parts and properties, but not necessarily because we see or touch those parts and properties."
- [**Illusion**] "An analysis of perceptual illusion is possible without the assumption of sense data or sense-impressions intervening between the perceiver and the physical world."
- [**Consciousness**] "A cognitive event may occur and pass away unnoticed or unperceived. We can neither recall it nor communicate it to others unless we have first inwardly perceived it." (*Perception* 1986, 5–6)

Direct Realism Does Not Entail Naive Realism

"What direct realism affirms is that perceptual experience of physical reality does not depend on perceiving a mediating mental reality […] An object is perceived directly if and only if perceiving it does not depend on perceiving some other object." (Genone 2016, 3).

"The most minimal representationalist commitment is that perceptual experience is a matter of a subject representing her environment as being a certain way'" (Schellenberg 2011, 715)

Direct Realism Does Not Entail Naive Realism

"The veil-of-perception view holds that the primary objects of perception are internal mental items - or other non-environmental items. The primary referents are sense data or phenomenal qualities in the mind. On such a view, experience of the physical world is held to be indirect, both in not being the first object of perceptual reference and in being the product of an epistemically evaluable inference from more fundamental objects of perception. [….However…] Perceptual representation does not produce a "veil of ideas," because the first objects of perceptual reference are physical entities in the environment. This is a sense in which perceptual representations are "directly" about the environment: They are referentially non-derivative. Perception of distal physical entities does not go by way of reference to entities closer in […and] perceptual consciousness is fundamentally of the physical world." (Burge 2005, 30).)
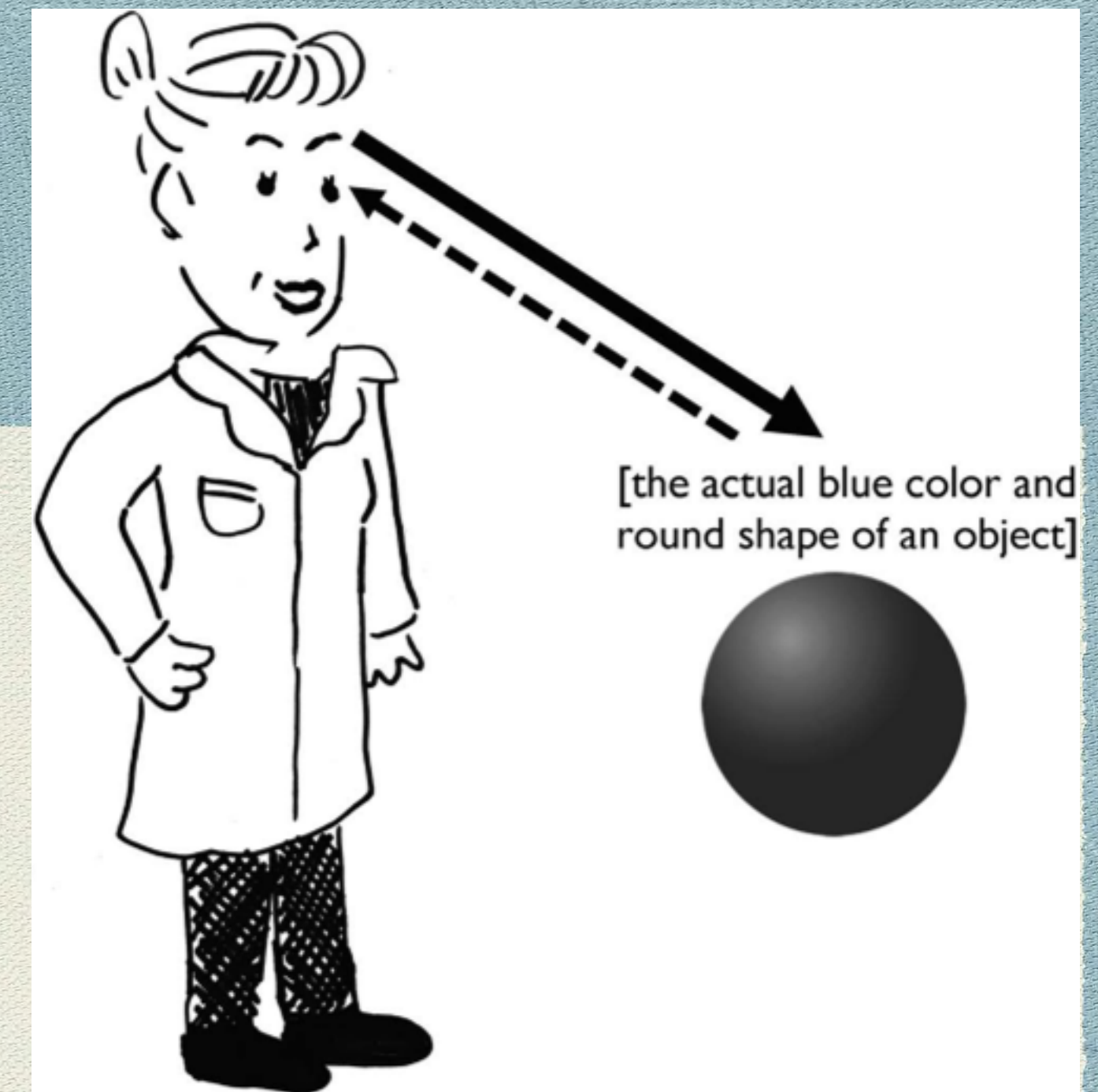
Two Problems with Matilal's Exposition

- Directness: A demonstration that Nyāya Realism is committed to Directness is not a proof that it is a version of Naïve Realism.

- The Kant-Strawson thesis: *vikalpa/prakāra* = concept → Representationalism: "The dispute over *vikalpa* is whether all *vikalpas* are fictional or some of them are true representations of reality" (1986, 314)

What is Naïve Realism?

[the actual blue color and round shape of an object]

Perceptual experiences a kind of episode or event that is **fundamentally** both **presentational** and **relational**.

"To claim that perceptual experiences are fundamentally **presentational** is to claim at least that perceptual experiences are by their very nature constituted, at least in part, by mind-independent objects and their manifest properties [...and...] to claim that perceptual experiences are fundamentally **relational** is to claim that perceptual experiences involve a distinct conscious relation between a conscious subject and some object" (Steenhagen 2019, 1002).

Austere Relationalism

[the actual blue color and round shape of an object]

 Austere naïve realism: visual phenomenology is entirely constituted by the objects and properties in the visual scene with which one is related.

 "... the phenomenal character of your experiences, as you look around the room, is constituted by the actual layout of the room itself: which particular objects are there, their intrinsic properties, such as colour and shape, and how they are arranged in relation to one another and to you." (Campbell 2002, p. 116)

Problems

[the actual blue color and round shape of an object]
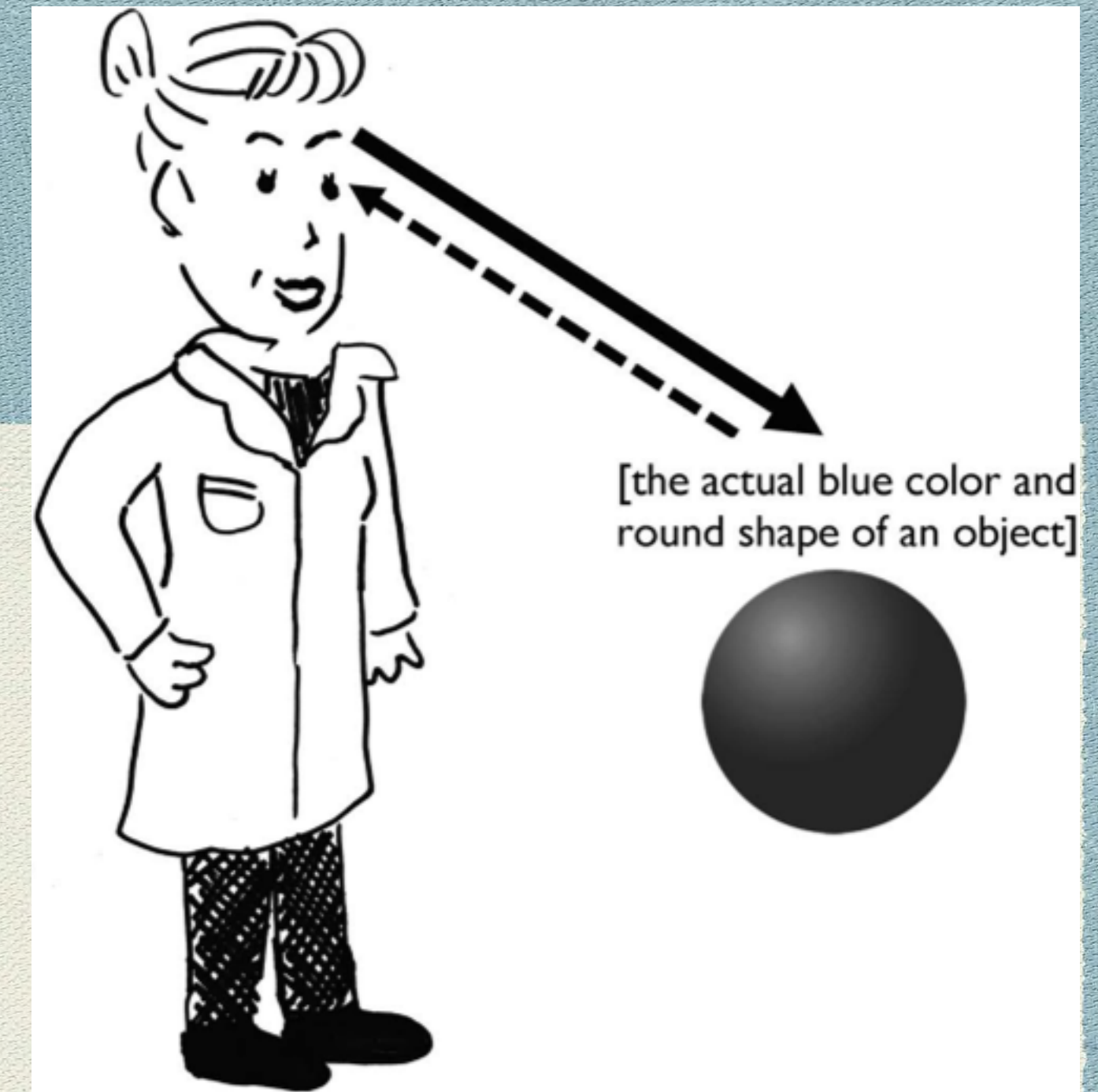
- Covert attention shifts on perceptual phenomenology (shifting one's attention between two dots without moving one's eyes, for example),
- The physical constitution of the sensory faculties (Logue 2012),
- Top-down influences on perception ("cognitive penetration") and
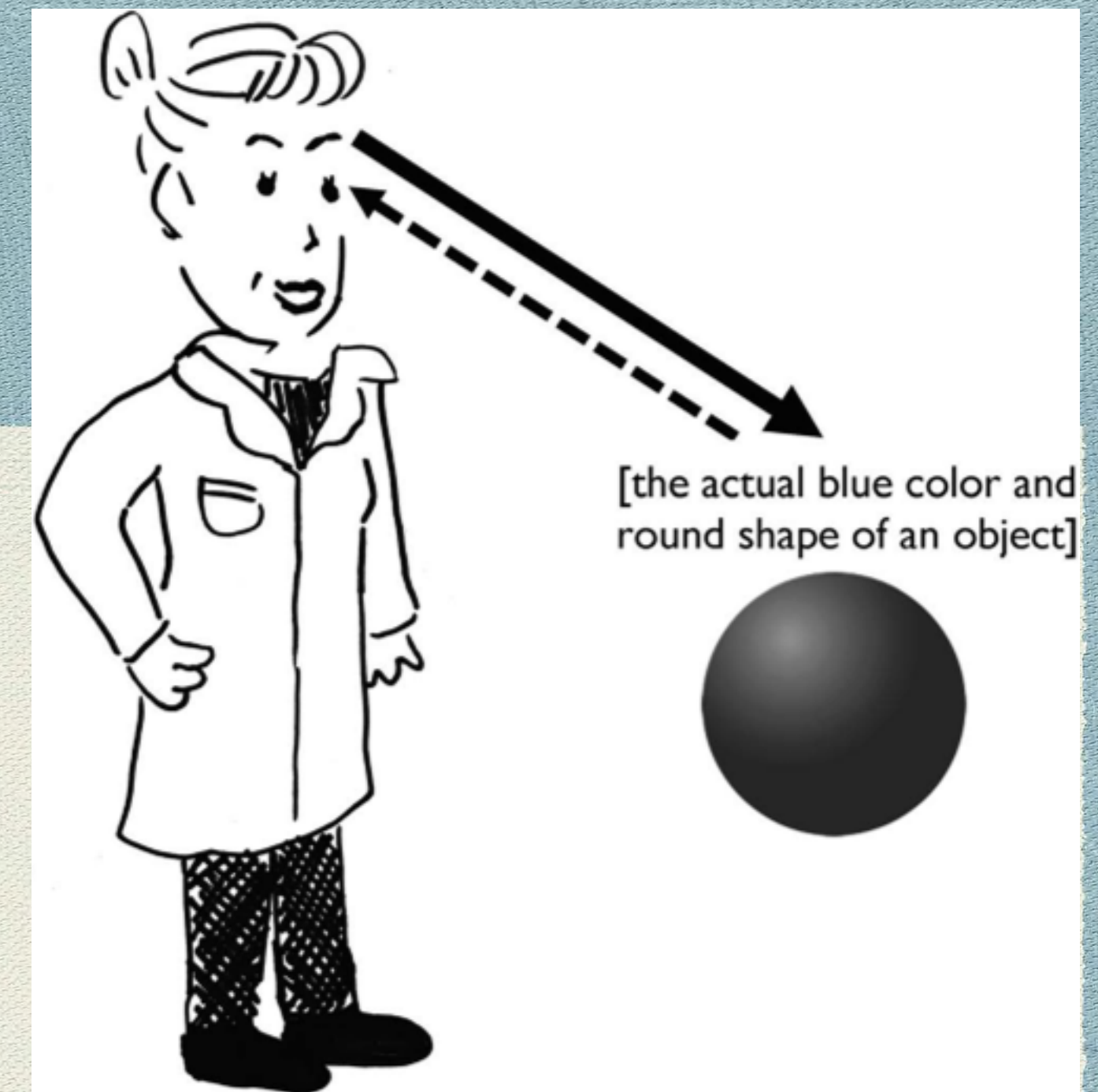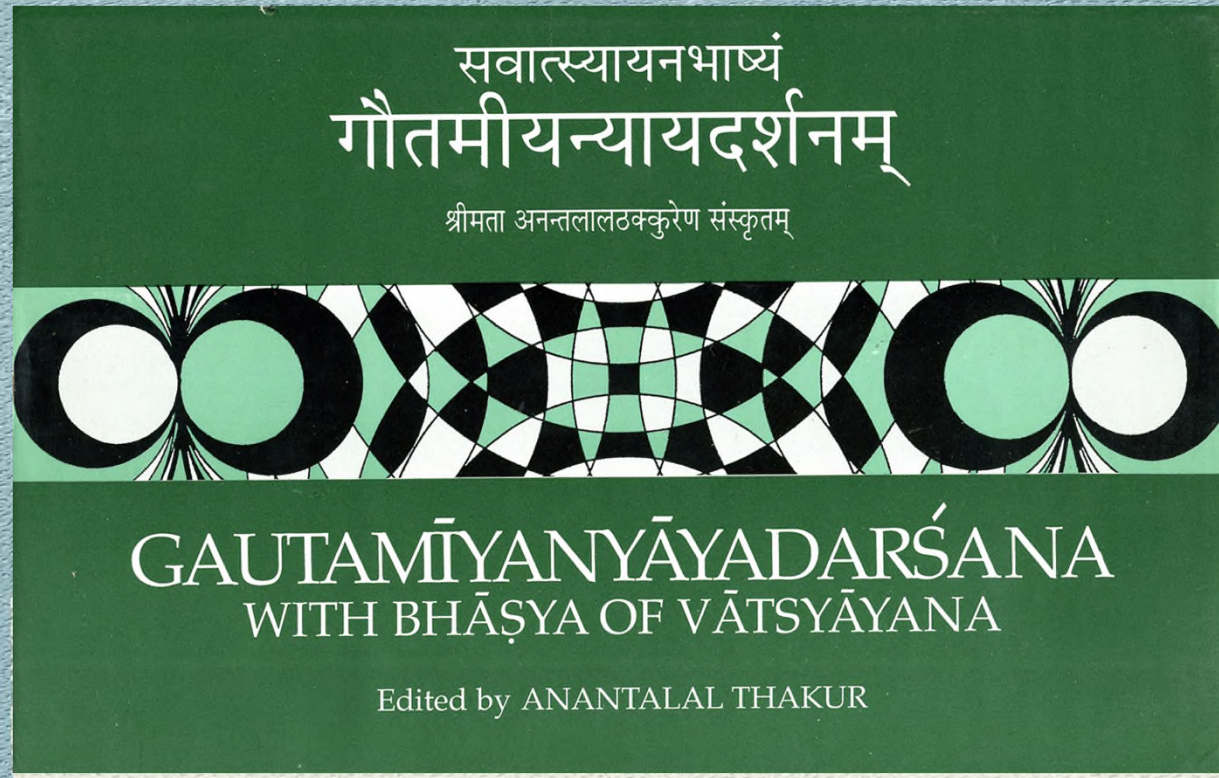- Visual blur (Pautz 2021, 192)
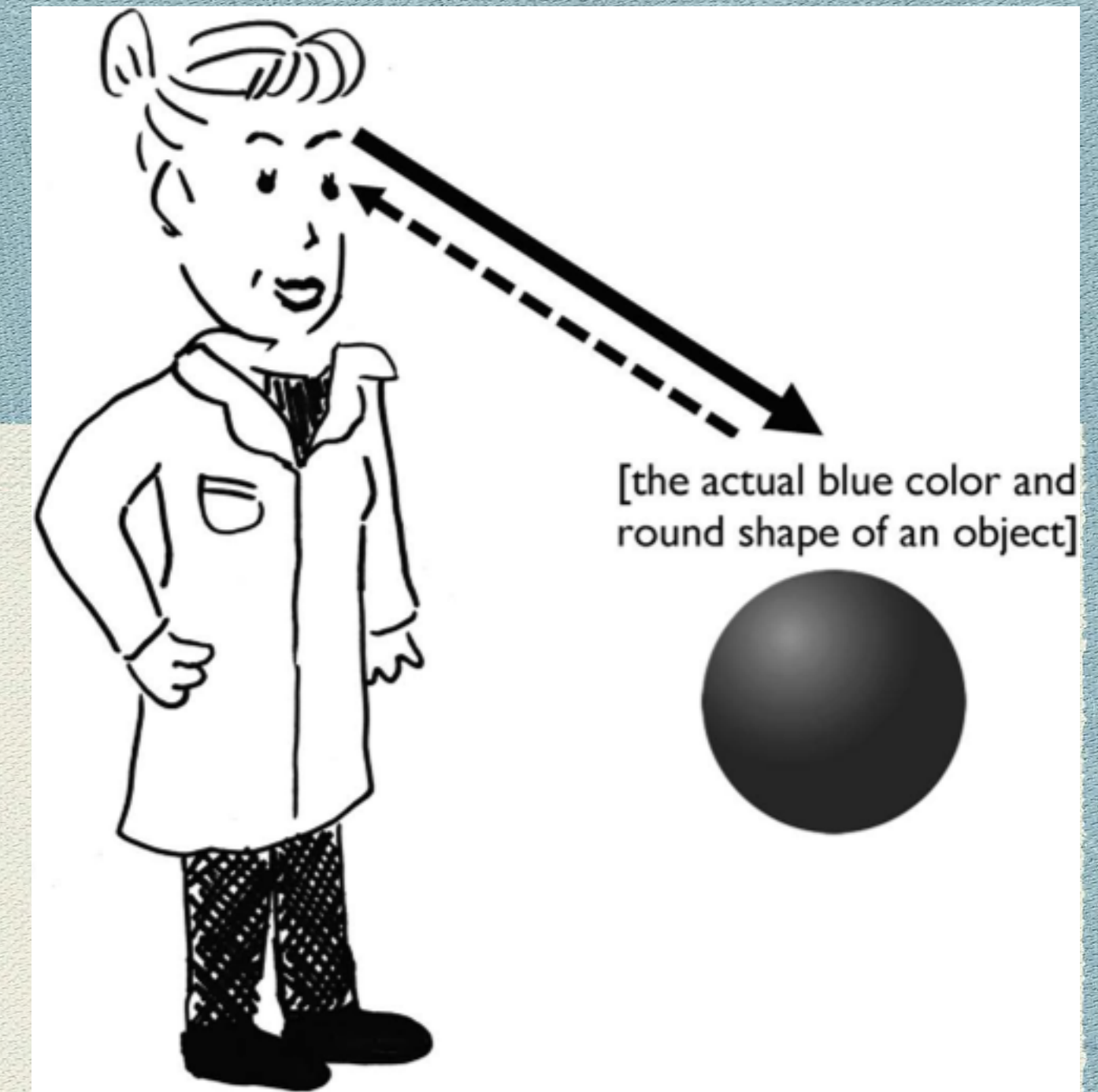
Mitigated Relationalism

[the actual blue color and round shape of an object]

"… it's open to the Naïve Realist to claim that phenomenal character is determined by the *obtaining of the perceptual relation* more broadly. That is, Naïve Realism can appeal to *both* relata in accounting for the phenomenal character of veridical experience, as well as to facts about the relation itself." (Logue 2012, 217)

"Explain not just which objects and properties a perceiver experiences, but also how they are experienced" (Genone 2016, 14).
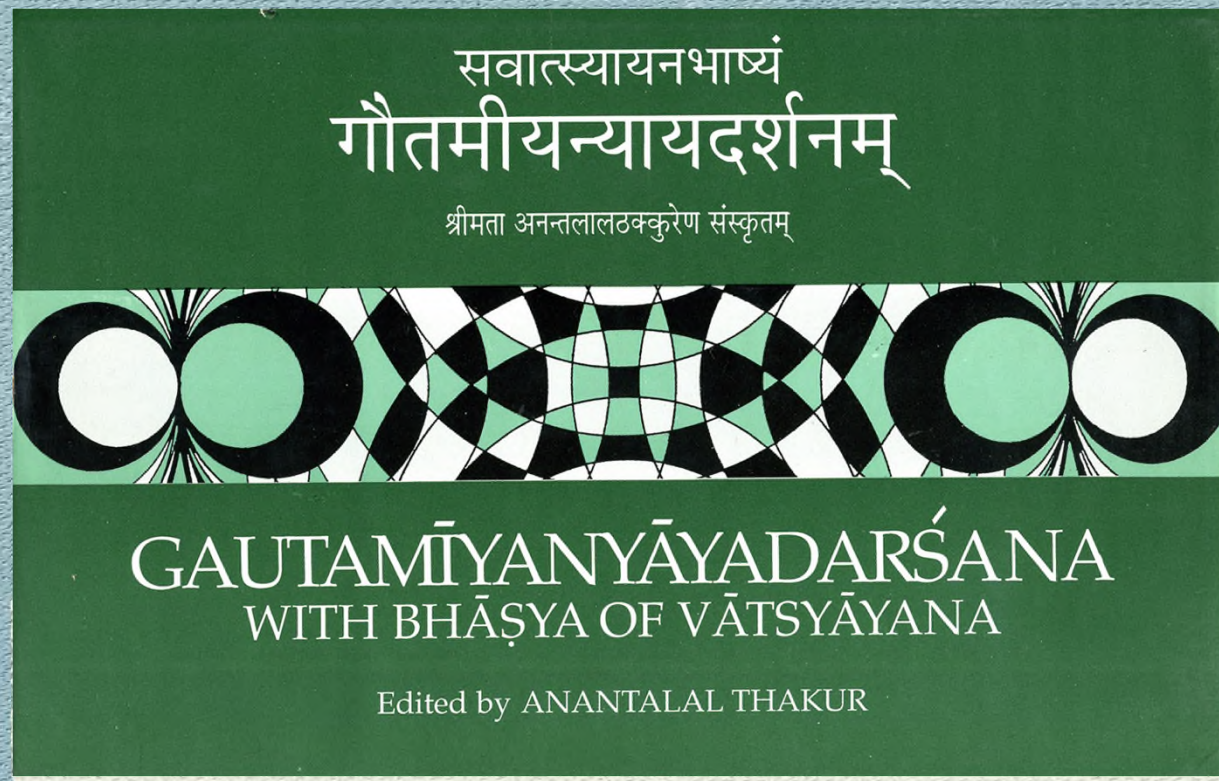
"Genuine perceptual experience is

– independent of language (*avyapadeśya*),

– inerrant (*avyabhicāri*),

– of a definite character (*vyvasāyātmaka*), and

– results from (*utpanna*) a connection (*sannikarṣa*)

between sense and object."
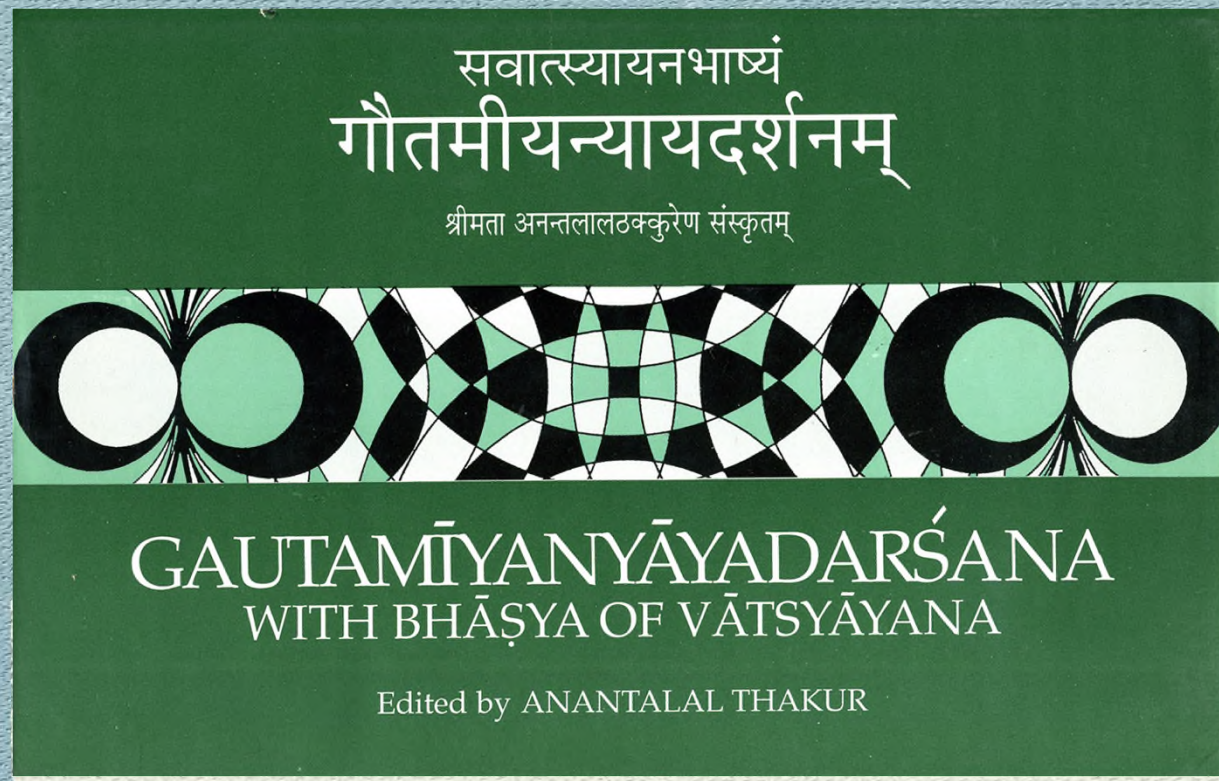
(*Nyāya-sūtra* 1997, 10.2-3)

सवात्स्यायनभाष्यं
गौतमीयन्यायदर्शनम्
श्रीमता अनन्तलालठक्कुरेण संस्कृतम्

GAUTAMĪYANYĀYADARŚANA
WITH BHĀṢYA OF VĀTSYĀYANA

Edited by ANANTALAL THAKUR

"When you perceive the sphere, you experience its blue color and its shape, but not its electric charge. Why? According to the basic causal theory, the answer is that your visual system is causally responsive in the right way to its color and shape, but not to its electric charge. You can think of it this way. Experiential acquaintance is a kind of irreducible mental arrow pointed at the states of objects. But, in the actual world, in order for this arrow to be pointed at those external states, there first must be a causal process going in the opposite "direction", from those states to the right processes in the subject's brain." (Pautz 2021, 190)
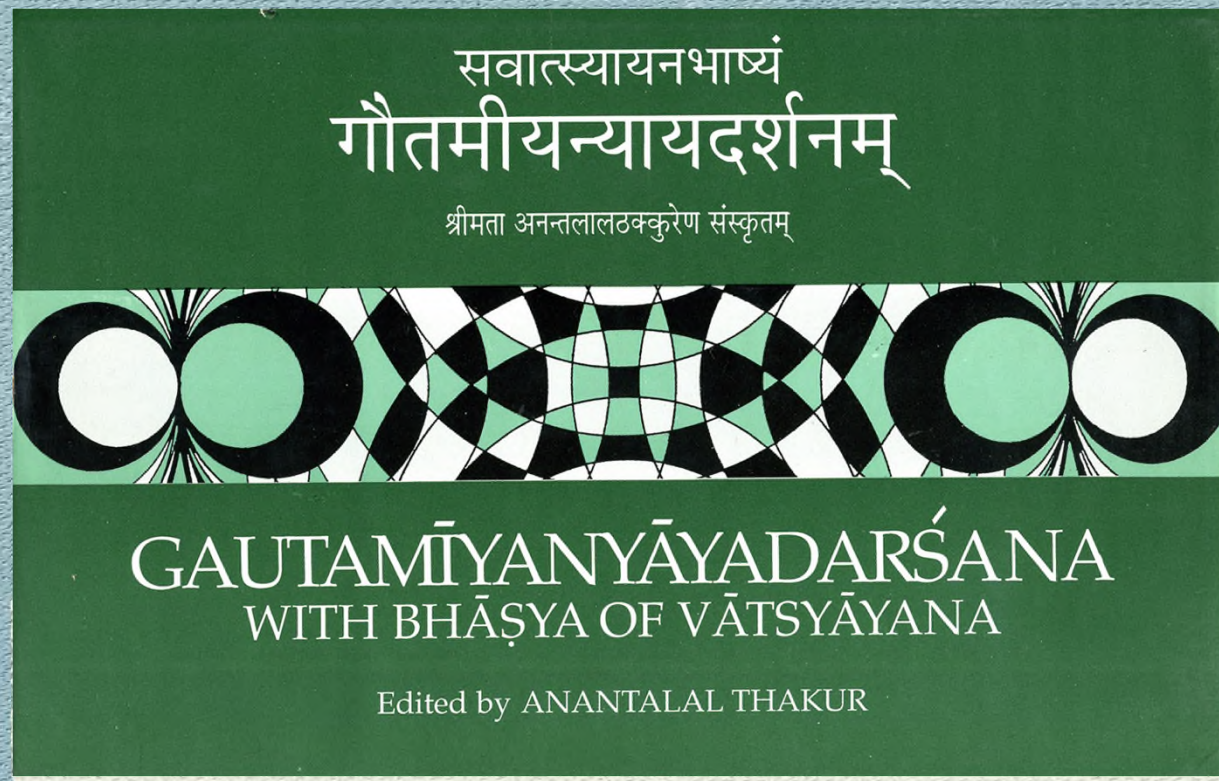
Perceptual Structure

"Visual experience is remarkable for two reasons. It seems to involve conscious portrayal of the world; and it seems to involve perceptual contact with the world. When one sees a cat in the ordinary way, for instance, that bit of consciousness seems to involve the worldly depiction of a cat, somehow; and it also seems to involve perceptual contact with a cat. There is much debate about such depiction and perceptual contact. We needn't commit to any story about them." (Sturgeon 2008, 112-3).

vyavasāyātmaka: feature access

"A person looking at something at a distance is unable to determine precisely what it is, whether it is smoke or a cloud of dust. So to exclude from the ranks of genuine perceptions such unclear cognition (*anavadhāraṇa-jñāna*) which does arise from a connection between a sense faculty and an object, the sūtra-maker uses the qualifier 'of definite character'" (*Nyāya-bhāṣya* 1997, 11.7-9).

Attention: Selection & Access

"In visually attending to a scene, one dimension of your experience has to do with the characteristics of objects that you would report them to have, act with respect to, or report yourself as experiencing. But another, more fundamental dimension of visual experience has to do with how you grab the object visually in the first place; how, in vision, you snatch it out from the rest of the visual array as something on which you are going to focus. This is not a matter of you representing the object in experience; it is not a matter of experiential representation at all. It has to do with the relation between you and the object. It makes a constitutive difference to your visual experience. And it reflects the mind-independence of the thing." (Campbell 2014b, 51)
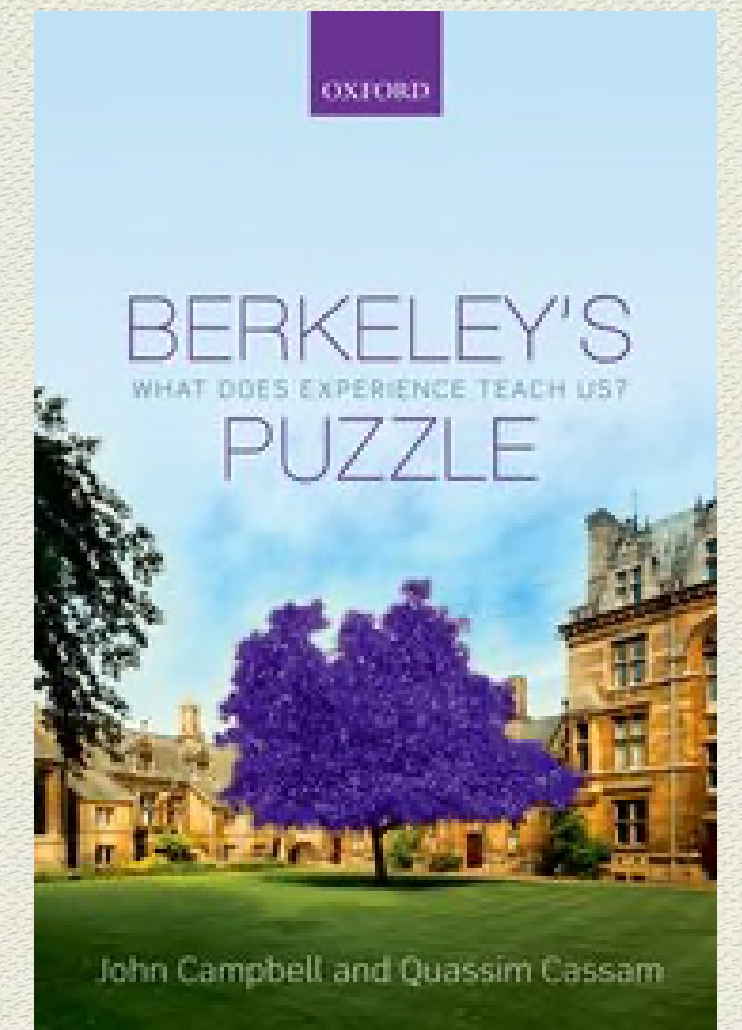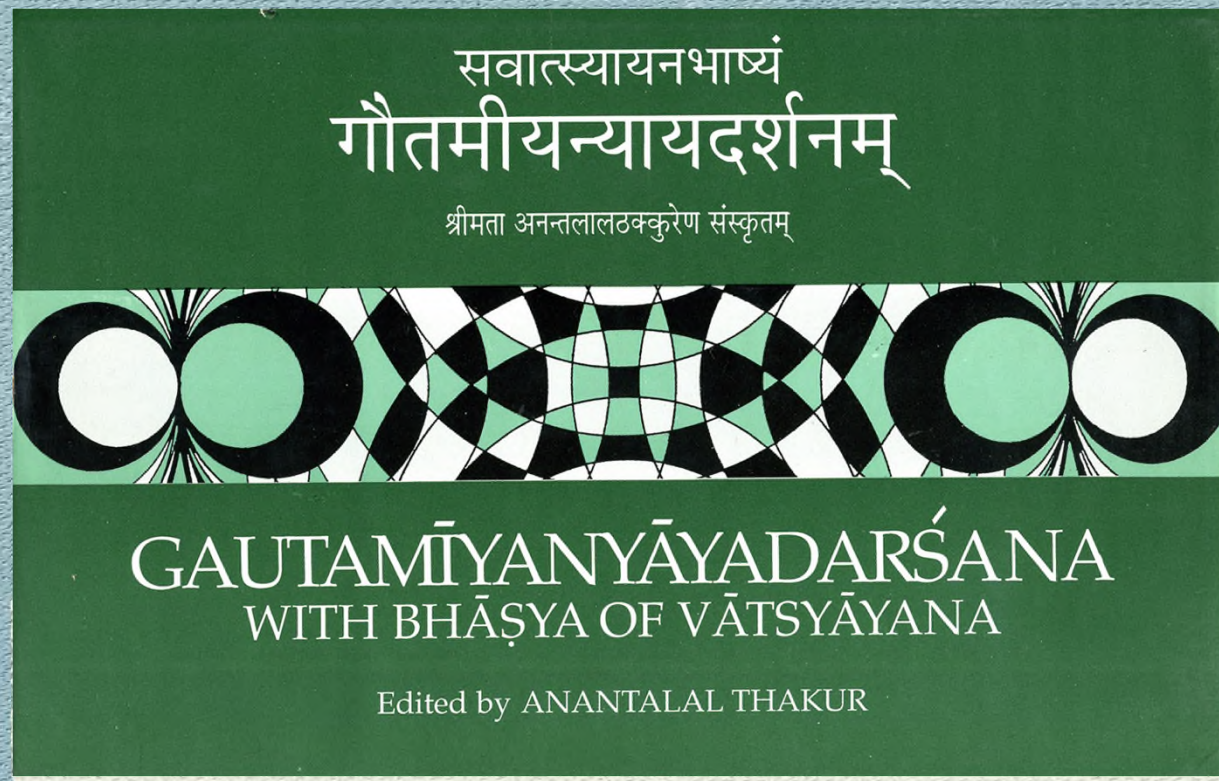
Attention: Selection & Access

  "Huang and Pashler (2007) draw a fundamental distinction between selection and access in visual attention. This is a distinction between two ways a perceived property can function in relation to an object or region. Grabbing the thing out from its background (selection) is one thing, and characterizing it (access) is another. So a property may be used to select the object or region. Or the property may be accessed as a property of that object or region. Selection is what makes the object or region visible in the first place; selection is what makes it possible for the subject to focus on that object or region in order to ascertain its various properties. Access is a matter of the subject making it explicit, in one way or another, just which manifold properties the object or region has. The key point is that whether a property is being used to select an object in experience is one thing, and whether the subject is accessing that property of the object is another. You can use a property of the object to snatch it out. It is a further step to make it explicit that the object has that property." (ibid, 54)
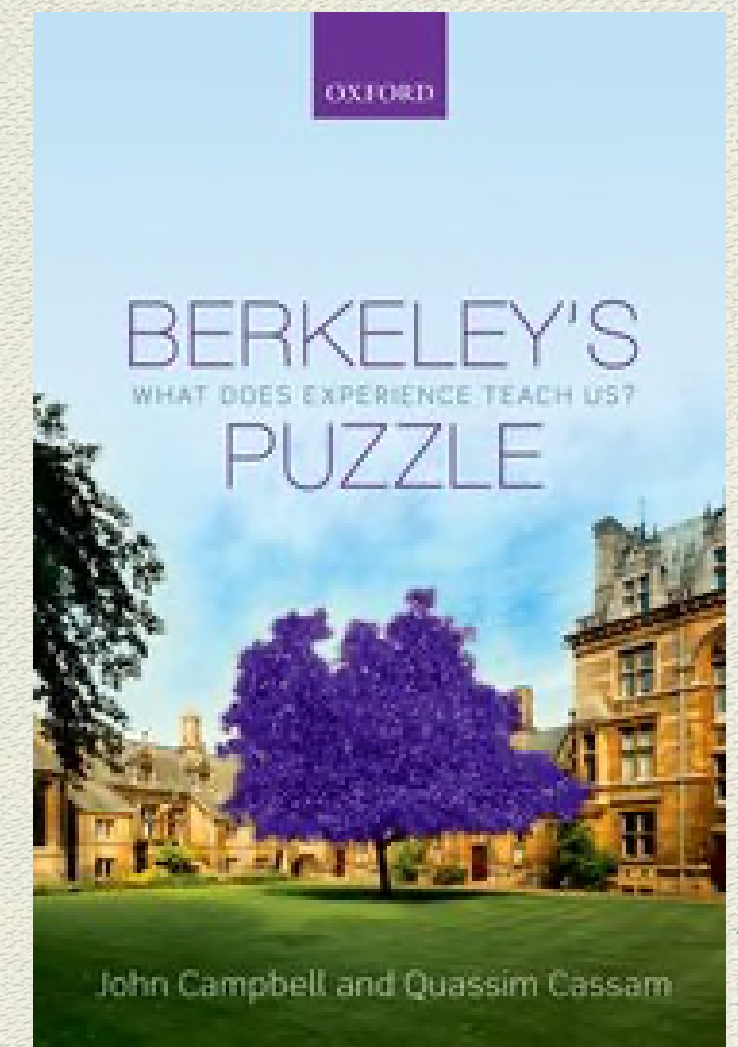
vyavasāyātmaka & avyapadeśa

"They led to a vortex of controversy, eventually suggesting a radical distinction between conception-free (*nirvikalpaka*) perception and conception-loaded (*savikalpaka*) perception" (Matilal 2002b, 186).

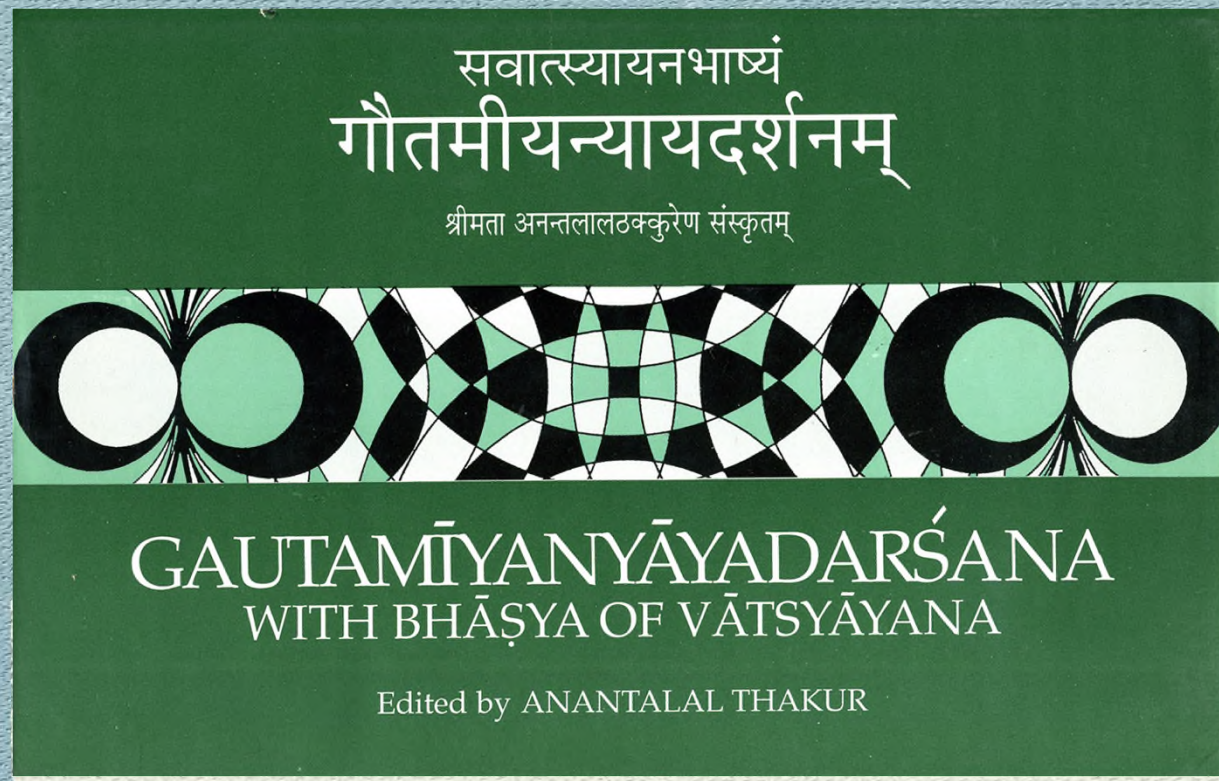avyapadeśa = selection
vyavasāyātmaka = access

prakāra & dharmitāvacchedaka

"We may draw a distinction between two different aspects of attention and between two different roles a perceived property can play in attention. Attention is selecting an object or region, and [it is also] finding out something about its properties. So, there is accessing a property of an already selected object or region, and there is using a property as the basis on which an object or region is selected in the first place." (2011, 324).

"The mode of presentation of a perceptually demonstrated object has to be characterized not in terms of any internal 'qualia' or any description that the subject accesses, but rather in terms of an external property of an external thing that the subject uses to select that object perceptually. Sameness of mode of presentation is the same thing as sameness of the external property on the basis of which the object is selected; difference of mode of presentation is the same thing as difference of the property on the basis of which the object is selected. This gives us an externalist mode of presentation for the perceptual case" (2014, 67)
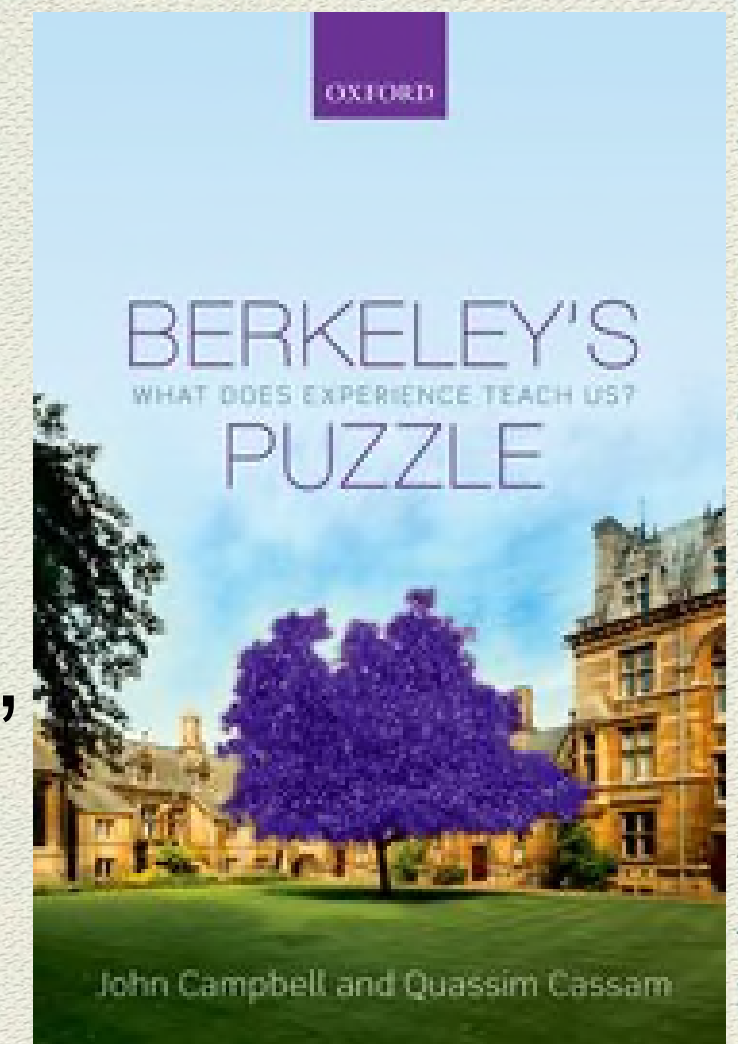
Summary

My reading of *Nyāya-sūtra* 1.1.4 has it that genuine perceptual experience is constituted by a relation with an object (the phenomenological "nucleus" of the experience), a direct relation of experiential acquaintance that is irreducible to satisfaction-conditions, and that it locates a perceptual feature in that nucleus, where this act of perceptual location is not a matter of seeing the object as falling under a concept; for to say that perceptual experience accesses a feature of a selected object is not to say that the object is perceived under a concept.

Seeing Face-to-Face: Nyāya Realism

Jonardon Ganeri

Thank You!